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Journalism and Emotional Work

Mervi Pantti ^a and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen^b

^aMedia and Communication Studies, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; ^bSchool of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

ABSTRACT

This essay introduces the special issue entitled Journalism and Emotional Work. It argues the need for a context-sensitive understanding of emotional work in journalism profession. Contributions to the issue elucidate the social context for and the social consequences of emotional work. It demonstrates that journalists' emotional work is shaped by the changes in the industry and specific contexts in which they carry out their work.

KEYWORDS

Emotion; journalism; emotional work; emotion management; professional norms; digital journalism practice

In her pioneering work, Arlie Hochschild (1983) addresses emotional labor as a way to meet organizational goals and industry demands. Employees perform emotional labor when they suppress, overplay, postpone or silence their emotions for organizational profit and social norms of feeling in a specific situation. In other words, they manage their emotions for the wage in the workplace. Hochschild's theorization explicitly condemns emotional labor as an exploitative aspect of work that leads to alienation and fatigue (1979, 659). In Hochschild's research, the concept of emotional labor refers to the management of one's own emotions to conform to work requirements and social norms, while "emotional work" refers to relating to and dealing with other people's emotions. We use the concept of emotional work as a general term that encompasses a range of emotion-related practices which go beyond emotional labor, and which have largely been invisible in both practice and scholarship about journalism.

Her pioneering work has been widely adapted, if not without challenge. It has been criticized for its overwhelming focus on individual experiences at the expense of workplace social relations (e.g., Bolton 2005) and for its emphasis on the distinction between inauthentic and real emotions (Kotířová 2019). Social scientific research has also attempted to address emotional labor not only as emotionally straining but also as a source of professional satisfaction (Bolton and Boyd 2003). Literature on emotional labor has been mostly interested in service, care and education professions. However, in the fields of media and cultural industries studies, scholars have examined demands of emotional labor taking place in the production of television genres such as talk shows, talent shows and reality TV (Grindstaff 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). Drawing on Hochschild's concept of emotional labor, these studies examine the

CONTACT Mervi Pantti  mervi.pantti@helsinki.fi

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specific ways in which media workers' emotional labor is entangled with power and precarious working conditions.

While we think it is imperative to continue Hochschild's critical work that politicizes emotion at work, there is also a need to use and develop theoretical approaches that capture the full range of emotional work performed in the journalism profession. Like other professions, journalism involves demands for emotion management in order to comply with professional norms and social emotion norms. However, journalists' experience and management of emotion have been largely under-researched, rendering invisible what is actually a central constitutive feature of journalism profession. The dominant expectation of the journalism profession has been that journalists are objective, impartial and detached observers of events. Journalists are expected to witness and give expression to emotions experienced by others, whilst subduing their own emotions.

The objectivity norm, as journalism scholars have noted, plays a significant role in the emotional work journalists engage in through their daily work. Journalists' emotional work both operates alongside and sits in tension with expectations of objectivity associated with appropriate professional practice (Hopper and Huxford 2015; Pantti 2010; Richards and Rees 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). In their study of how journalism textbooks address emotional labor and its consequences in journalism, Megan Hopper and John Huxford note that while "there are directives for journalists to manipulate their own emotions in order to be successful in their trade, there is little if any clear instruction on how this may be done" (2017, p. 90).

In journalism studies, the most studied context of emotion management is crisis journalism – reporting on extreme situations such as genocides, wars, disasters and major accidents. This is also the context where the professional idea of detachment is perhaps most difficult to perform and the impacts of emotional labor are the most tangible, as shown by the extensive psychological research on journalists and trauma (e.g., Backholm and Idås 2015; Buchanan and Keats 2011; Feinstein and Nicolson 2005). The growing attention to emotional impact of crisis reporting has provided a much-needed starting point for a larger debate about journalists' emotional work. At the same time, there is also a need to study how journalists and other news workers across different media, fields of journalism, professional roles and different geo-political contexts engage with and manage emotions.

New Directions in the Study of Emotional Work in Journalism Studies

This issue is based on a view that it is important to understand journalism as a profession and practice which is profoundly shaped by multifaceted emotional work. Routine practices of news production require substantial and largely unacknowledged emotional work which goes on "behind the scenes" and "below the surface." It does so in at least two specific ways: first of all, in enacting the requirement for professional objectivity; and, secondly, in managing interactions with sources. In journalism – as in other professional realms – correcting for emotions is in itself a kind of emotional work. Journalists do so through adhering to the practices of the strategic ritual of objectivity (Tuchman 1972). Further, when journalists *do* opt to incorporate emotion into their storytelling, this also takes considerable effort (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). In particular, it requires a great degree of emotional sensitivity with respect to "emotion rules" (Reddy 2001) governing the

correct public display of emotions in journalistic narratives. These include implicit rules about who should discuss their emotions, how they do so, and which emotions are appropriate in particular circumstances (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019). Secondly, journalists must also carry out significant emotional work in their work with sources. Here, they are aided by the widespread social acceptance of the professional privilege of journalists. This privilege allows them to approach strangers and ask them to disclose what is often sensitive or personal information. But the power differential between journalists and sources, and the artificial social situation that it sets up, nonetheless requires careful negotiation that often takes the form of emotional work. Along those lines, codes of ethics frequently recognize – implicitly or explicitly – the need be “sensitive” to their sources (e.g., Society of Professional Journalists 2014). At the same time, recognition of emotional work as an important requirement tends to be largely implicit, rather than explicit, in trade discussions (Hopper and Huxford 2015, 2017).

It is important to highlight that different types of journalistic work require different types of emotional work. A political reporter negotiating with a spin doctor over the interpretation of a policy proposal requires very different forms of emotional work as opposed to a feature reporter talking to a drug addict about their life history, and a local reporter interviewing school children about their sports day. These differences are informed by gender and power, as well as cultural capital in the journalistic field. For example, the much-celebrated and high-prestige genre of investigative journalism might require the most complex forms of emotional work, as reporters wrangle reactions and the attainment of sensitive information from sources, and negotiate access and forms of attribution, as well as carefully calibrate the generation of moral outrage and, through that, solidarity with the sufferers of wrongdoing (e.g., Ettema and Glasser 1998).

Accordingly, this issue aims to develop a context-sensitive understanding of emotional work in journalism profession. Contributions to the issue elucidate the social context for and the social consequences of emotional work. They demonstrate that journalists’ emotional work is shaped by the changes in the industry and specific contexts in which they carry out their work. These questions come up, in Richard Stupart’s contribution examining journalists covering the conflict in South Sudan. Journalists’ (negative) emotion is typically seen as a consequence of the practice of journalism. However, rather than seeing emotion as an outcome, Stupart’s article examines the interaction of journalists’ feelings of exhaustion and their journalistic practice in South Sudan. His article makes a case for the need to approach emotion as an intrinsic part of the practice as well as expanding the research on the emotional work in specific practices of journalism.

This also entails attention to the work that journalists do in managing the emotions of their audiences. As Richards (2007) notes, journalists’ emotional work shapes public emotions. Journalists both construct and manage collective emotional response, for instance by focusing on socially acceptable, unifying or “calming” emotions (such as grief and compassion) rather than on disruptive emotions (such as anger) (e.g., Pantti and Wieten 2005; Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen 2011). Moreover, in the context of crisis journalism, journalistic witnessing involves a commitment to elicit an emotional response that incites the audience to action (e.g., Tait 2011).

While new media platforms and forms facilitate journalists’ own emotional involvement in their stories by encouraging personal value judgements and sharing personal

feelings (Pantti 2019), the affordances of new technologies also allow for new ways of appealing to audiences' emotions, and for audiences to engage with news content. Four contributions in this issue focus on the impact of technological changes on emotional work.

Nete Nørgaard Kristensen responds to the call to study journalistic genres beyond reporting of crises, public affairs and politics by engaging with little studied cultural criticism. Her contribution shows that due to changes in media technology and in the organization of journalistic work, cultural journalism has seen an emotional and subjective turn. As Nørgaard Kristensen argues, subjective style and emotionality function as branding strategies in cultural journalism in the current precarious media work.

James Dennis and Susana Sampaio Dias demonstrate in their article that digital native news outlets *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* draw on an emotional vernacular borrowed from social media to engage with and relate to their young audience. This emotional vernacular relies on subjective, confessional, and personalized forms of expression. At the same time, these news organizations provide engaging political content through their long-form analytical election reporting. This suggests that we cannot easily make binary distinctions between "emotional" and "rational" forms of journalism, but instead consider the uses of emotional language as a resource for audience engagement. At the same time, the affordances of social media interact in complex ways with journalists' use of emotional language. Danielle Brown and Summer Harlow's analysis of audience engagement with Facebook news posts about protests by mainstream U.S. news organizations shows that the social media site's affordances work in cohort with journalists' use of emotional appeals to legitimize some protests and delegitimize others.

Drawing on journalists' interviews, Nele Goutier, Yael de Haan, Kiki de Bruin, Sophie Lecheler and Sanne Kruikemeier examine immersive journalism, which has been celebrated for introducing new opportunities for emotionally compelling narratives and user engagement but is now waning. While most studies on immersive journalism have focused either on narrative strategies or user experiences, their contribution casts light on journalists' perceptions on immersive stories, especially on their struggle between traditional emotion norms of journalism and the strategic crafting of an emotional experience in immersive journalism.

One of the new directions in journalism study of emotion management is scholars' interest in how time influences emotion management. In this issue, Lenka Waschková Císařová's longitudinal interview study of Czech local journalists shows that the volatility of employment conditions has a profound impact on journalists' emotional attachment to their work, and informs their coping strategies. Further, as Waschková Císařová's contribution explores in more detail, journalists' must also negotiate their own personal emotional investments in their work. Large-scale, cross-national surveys consistently show that journalists see their work as a "calling" and a "noble profession" (e.g., Weaver et al. 2009, 58). As journalists, like other creative workers, labor in increasingly precarious conditions, news organizations have come to rely on journalists' emotional attachment to their work (Morini, Carls, and Armano 2014). More broadly, if, as scholars have argued, emerging patterns of labor within the creative industries constitute a distinctive formation of "creative capitalism", it is also one that requires continual justification and maintenance (Duffy and Wissinger 2017; Szaniecki and Cocco 2015).

The current organizational expectations shape journalists' emotional work. Two articles in this issue in particular point to the relevance of Hochschild's critical work on emotional labor as they show that emotion is increasingly commodified in journalism and approached as a strategic resource. Antje Glück's comparative study of broadcast journalists in India and the UK demonstrates that the role of emotionality in reporting is heavily influenced by the political economy of news production, with expressions of emotion being more readily embraced in the heavily commercialized Indian media industry. Journalistic work is increasingly configured by the "passion economy," characterized by strong emotional attachment to the work, combined with relatively precarious and challenging working conditions. At the same time, "passion" is increasingly a managerial selling point, as shown by Carl-Gustav Lindén, Katja Lehtisaari, Mikko Grönlund and Mikko Villi in their large-scale analysis of journalistic job advertisements. In the advertisements, passion emerges as a strategic resource for managers, pointing to a commodification of feelings and the structural exploitation of journalists' emotional attachment to their work. Together, these two contributions remind us that emotional work in journalism does not occur in isolation, but is heavily influenced by the fate of the institution of journalism and the surrounding society, including financial logics.

The understanding of emotional work in journalism as shaped by institutional transformations is a significant theme in Débora Medeiros and Margret Lünenborg's article, which focuses on the fraud scandal around Claas Relotius, an award-winning German feature reporter for the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. In 2018, he was found to have fabricated a large number of high-profile stories. The discovery of his fabrication brought about a heated discussion in the media about structural problems in journalism. Medeiros and Lünenborg carry out a discourse analysis of international and national newspaper debate on the scandal. Their study demonstrates a preoccupation with emotion across discussions of the form of feature reporting, the emotions of Relotius as an actor, the role of emotion in editorial practice, and the discussion of the affective implications of the event for the institution of journalism.

Taken together, the contributions for this special issue chart new territory in the study of emotion in journalism. They show that as a field, journalism studies has moved towards taking seriously and rendering visible emotion. As a vital part of this journey, the scholars contributing to the issue provide nuanced analysis of the emotional work carried out by journalists and the organizations they work for. This research shows us that emotional work varies across different types of news work and organization, different geographical contexts, and the varied platforms of news content. At the same time, such emotional work is dynamic as it changes over time and in response to economic transformations inside and outside the institution of journalism.

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ORCID

Mervi Pantti  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9332-1556>

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